

Michael Logie
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The Qualifications and Decorum of a Teacher of Christianity considered ; with a view to the temper of the present age respecting religion, and to some late attacks which have been made upon it.

A
S E R M O N

Preached before

The SYNOD of ABERDEEN,

At Aberdeen, April 8, 1755.

B Y

ROBERT TRAILL, &

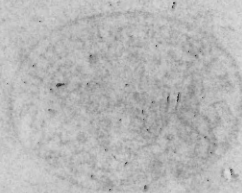
Minister of BANFF.

Published by Desire of the SYNOD

A B E R D E E N :

Printed by J. CHALMERS ; and sold by A. THOM-
SON Bookseller in the *Broadgate*.

M.DCC.LV.



T O

The Right Honourable,

J A M E S,

Earl of *Findlater* and *Seafield*,

Vice-Admiral of SCOTLAND ;

The following SERMON,

Being partly in Defence of THAT RELIGION,
which HE LOVES and HONOURS,

Is, with the truest Respect, inscribed by

His LORDSHIP's

most obliged,

most humble,

and most obedient Servant

R. TRAILL.



T O

The Right Honorable

J A M E S

Earl of Falkland and Clarendon

Viscount of Scotland



The Honorable

Being paid in Debt of that nation

which he loves and honors

to the most Right Honorable

the Lord

and

and

and

and

The QUALIFICATIONS and DECORUM of a Christian TEACHER.

P s A L M. xciii. 5.

Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever.

AMong the various incentives, which are proper to animate the ministers of religion, to a spirited and assiduous discharge of their duty; perhaps there is none, which may be urged with greater propriety, than the respect which they owe to the character they sustain. A zeal for the honour of the profession, and an inflexible adherence to its true principles, have always been esteemed, in every art, the sure symptoms of the artist's worthy and liberal turn of mind. And it is but natural, to expect it of them, whose business consists so much in admonishing others of those regards, which are due to their character, that they should be peculiarly concerned for their own, and feel a generous ambition to accomplish it with every useful, and adorn it with every becoming quality. No person of true judgment and taste can bear, without a sensible dislike, the survey of his own character, when he finds it greatly below the standard of what is meet and decent in the kind. The manifest incongruity hurts the mental eye, and affects the interior sense with a like painful dissatisfaction, as when we behold a mean copy of an excellent original, or a fair and just model executed in a wretched and contemptible manner. The world, likewise, will generally be affected in the same way.

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The greater encroachments upon the integrity and decorum of our character will cause a general indignation ; and our smaller trespasses will expose us to contempt or ridicule. It is needless to say, how much we must suffer, in this way, as to our influence and capacity of doing good ; and, by consequence, how much it concerns us to guard against those breaches of character, which will render us odious, insignificant or contemptible.

The design, at present, my reverend fathers and brethren, is, in obedience to your commands, and in confidence of your candour, to attempt a delineation of that holiness, which is here said, by the sacred poet, to be so becoming the house of God ; to point out the principal ingredients which are necessary to compleat the character of a teacher of religion and virtue ; and to describe that spirit and those manners, which are requisite to give life and grace to the whole composition. And in selecting, amidst such a variety of matter, those particulars, which may seem to have a preferable claim to our present attention, it is proposed to regulate the choice, by their own apparent utility and importance, and by keeping all along in our eye, the general character of the present age with respect to religion, and the general disposition of this generation of men toward its ministers.

In treating this subject, I shall not attempt curiously to trace the sentiment of decorum, up to those ultimate principles of the human mind, which must terminate all our enquiries. The occasion doth not require our taking things so deep.

It is evident, that in order to determine what is necessary to finish and embellish any subject whatever, we must keep a steady eye upon the main end proposed. Every accomplishment which serves to promote that end, must be studiously sought after; and every ornament, which would divert the attention from the leading design, should, with a jealous and unremitting severity, be rejected.

The great end of the christian ministry, is to instruct men in the principles, and to engage them in the love and practice of piety and all virtue; that they may become useful members of society in this world, may attain such a measure of happiness, as the present imperfect condition of humanity will permit, and may be qualified for enjoying that superior felicity in the world to come, which is the gift of God thro' Jesus Christ.

Let us, then, take a general view of those religious and moral principles, which are the main subject of a christian minister's instructions. Thus shall we be led, I think, most directly, into that track, which will be fittest for us to pursue in the present enquiry.

The whole compass of natural and revealed religion, comes within our province, as christian teachers. Whatever nature suggests concerning God, a providence and a future state; concerning the moral constitution, offices and felicity of man, is all farther opened, illustrated and ratified by the christian revelation. The former represents virtue as agreeable to God; the latter promulgates it expressly as the law of heaven, stamps it with a divine authority, and arms it with sanctions the most awful and alluring, extending

ing beyond the grave to latest futurity. It is the joint doctrine of both, that the purest, the most independent, and the most durable joys of human life are the present fruits of virtue ; and experience sufficiently confirms the harmonious decision. Nature affords some obscure notices of an *Hereafter*, where goodness shall be finally rescued from ignominy and distress, advanced to superior honours, and blessed with a happiness worthy of itself, and lasting as the mind wherein it dwells. But it is revelation alone, which dispels the cloud that hangs over the other world, altogether ; and presents heaven opened with all its glories, and hell naked with all its horrors. Moreover, it opens another new and surprizing scene, highly interesting and comfortable to the friends of virtue. It introduces a new character upon the stage, the great mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine author of our religion ; who exhibited a character of the most consummate merit, both of active and passive virtue ; presented a sacrifice and propitiation acceptable, in the highest degree, to the supremely perfect being ; and was ‘ exalted, to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.’* Pardon is ascertained to the reformed penitent ; divine assistance is insured to the sincere but diffident candidate for perfection ; and future remunerations are held forth to stimulate his ardor, to encourage him to exert his utmost vigour, and to persevere in these efforts ; till death put a final period to the painful struggle between the flesh and the spirit, and assign the victorious combatant over to virtue, honour and immortality. Can

* Acts v. 31.

Can any thing be conceived to have a more friendly aspect on the interests of virtue and society, than such a system? Surely not: especially, if we consider farther, that the gospel breathes a spirit of the most intense and diffusive benignity, and is so far from leading us to overlook the concerns and offices of the present life, by terminating our views on one that is to come, that it represents the former as a school of discipline and education for the latter; and expressly dictates the love of God and of mankind, conjoin'd with corresponding acts of duty and service to both, as the great lessons to be learned in this school, with a view to our being qualified thereby, for acting our higher part, and relishing our superior felicity, as perfect men in the house and family of God. It is active goodness here below, which puts us in the way of preferment above; and if we would hope to be high, hereafter, in the favour of God, we must be strenuous and eminent, here, in the service of mankind.

One would think, that a genuine form of worth and decency should naturally be reflected from such a ground. The christian institution is manifestly calculated not to depress but exalt morality, not to fully or impair but to refine and compleat the virtuous temper. It is but reasonable, therefore, to think, that the teachers of these principles should not, upon that account, be in a more unfavourable situation for attaining and supporting a character of true worth; that they should have, at least, an equal chance with others for being honest men and good citizens; and that they have no occasion to be ashamed of their

calling, or blush to avow it before the world. And yet a late author, not satisfied with representing the character of a clergyman, to use his own style, as if it were not the most amiable that is to be met with in human society, hath thought fit to give vent to his spleen, in a still more undisguised manner. He tells us plainly, that the character we bear, with the exception of some individuals, is a monstrous medley of craft and dissimulation, ambition and vanity, arrogance and rancour; and, in general, that all the most odious vices of human nature are inflamed by the very genius of the sacerdotal profession. † You see, brethren, that, in this instance, the ballance of reason hath not been held, as is most usual with this author, in the equilibrium of scepticism. Here, he hath not only taken a side, but evidently let loose the reins to a spirit of satyr; which, we cannot help thinking, hath carried him beyond the bounds of equity and decency. The temper of christianity is eminently distinguished for probity and mildness: and it is surely a most unfair proceeding, to impute to the profession the vices of those, who have too often, alas! disgraced it, and to proscribe the former for the sake of the latter. Legal princes have often degenerated into enormous tyrants. Will it therefore, follow, that civil government itself is a nuisance? That men should sometimes, in the present imbecillity of human nature, start a-side from the genius of their profession, and deviate occasionally from their more established character, needs not be surprizing; and of this,

† *Hume's essays moral and political. Ess. 24.*

I apprehend, an instance is not wanting, in this satirical picture drawn by our author, wherein a candid reader will more readily discover the blind zeal of a party-man, than the cool suspense of the academy.

I hope there is no ground to estimate the general disposition of the publick toward our order, by that of this author. Nevertheless, attempts to wound religion, either immediately, or thro' the sides of her ministers, have been, of late, so frequent, that the church may be said, almost without a figure, to be in a militant state, and we are reduced to a like awkward and distressful situation, with *Nebemiah's* builders, 'who with one hand wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.' * The present conjuncture, therefore, evidently demands a thorough knowledge of the grounds and evidences of religion, in order to support the credit and decorum of our profession.

The abstract sciences have been pressed, of late, with an incongruous zeal, into the service of infidelity. And here we are sorry to find the author already mentioned again in our way, and that we cannot help considering him not only as one who hath treated the order with very little civility, but who hath also employed his notable abilities to strike at the root of all religion. Having summoned *Epicurus* anew upon the field, to defend his baffled cause, he supplies this antient infidel with modern logic, and sends him forth thus furnished with arguments, which have a manifest tendency to invalidate the proofs of

* *Neb. iv. 17.*

divine existence, to varnish over the absurdity, and palliate the noxious tendency of atheism.

The principal reasons, on which is founded this dissent from the general voice of human nature recognizing a perfect being the author of the existence and order of the universe, are the following. †

1. That the universe being an object quite singular and unparallel'd, we can form no conjecture or inference at all concerning its cause.

2. Allowing that the order of the universe indicates a deity, we are, indeed, at liberty to ascribe to him that precise degree of power, intelligence and benevolence which appears in his work ; but, no more.

The universe, it is said, is an object altogether singular and unparallel'd. No doubt, according to the rigorous import of the term, the universe comprehends the whole of things, and leaves nothing exterior to its all-including circle, with which it can be compared. And, in this way, indeed, the observation may be true ; but then, it is grammatical and trifling, if not captious and insidious. For, can any one be at a loss to find out the objects of comparison, which are requisite from the nature of the present argument ? Are they not plainly the works of nature, on the one hand ; and those of human art, on the other ? Now, that the former are altogether singular, can, by no means, be allowed ; when we evidently see, that they are similar, in many respects, to the latter, and bear equally strong and vivid, nay much more august and striking signatures of order and de-

† *Hume's philosophical essays. Ess. II.*

sign impressed upon them. It is, therefore, no unphilosophical licence, but a proceeding strictly legitimate, according to the severest rules of investigation, to judge that to be an effect which hath a manifest likeness to another object which we know to be an effect; to assign similar causes to similar effects; and, since we find that mind is the origin of artificial forms of order and of beauty, to infer, that mind also is the parent of similar natural ones, possessing these characters, not only in an equal, but a much superior degree. In a word, nature is not a singular effect, for it bears affinity to art, as wearing similar features of harmony and intention; neither is the inferred cause altogether singular, for it is allied to man, by intelligence common to both.

But here we are admonished, in *Epicurus's* name, to beware of ascribing to the deity any degree of power, wisdom or goodness, beyond what appears in his work. The ground of this caution seems to be a supposition, that the work is always an adequate measure of the ability, disposition and views of the workman; a principle which cannot be admitted, without certain restrictions and illustrations, even when we suppose the whole work to lie open to our inspection and scrutiny, and to be level to human apprehension. But certainly, when we survey a small portion only, or a detached fragment of any work of human genius; it is natural and obvious to conclude, that, if we saw the whole, we should discover far superior characteristics of art and excellence: and, therefore, that the artist is intitled to a larger measure of every rational and moral quality, than appears to be

be exemplified in the partial exhibition of those talents, which we had access to contemplate. And seeing the equity of this proceeding, with respect to human artists, is allowed ; is it fair, is it decent, after such a concession, to obstruct our availing ourselves of it, in our reasonings concerning the divine architect of the world ? Especially upon such a frivolous ground as this, that God is a single being in the universe, and is not comprehended under any genus or species with which we are acquainted. For, doth not the whole process, and every single step of our reasoning on this subject, tend to show, that God is an intelligent being, and by consequence, of the same genus with other intelligent beings, of whom we have a more intimate and familiar knowledge ? So that we may justly transfer to the former, those qualities of the latter, which plainly hold of intelligence, and are found by experience always to attend it.

This subject merits an ampler discussion, than we can afford, at present, to bestow upon it : especially as, I apprehend, you may think it proper, that some notice should be taken of the noted argument against miracles, which is urged from the same quarter, and introduced, not without some air of ostentation and triumph, as an infallible remedy against superstition, that is, against religion, according to a prevailing idiom in the diction of this author. He mentions it as a discovery, which he had made ; “ That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it en-

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deavours to establish." † By *Miraculous*, here, the author seems to mean, a violation of the usual course of nature, without taking in the idea of the deity or some invisible agent as the cause of that violation, according to his own definition of a miracle. And in this sense, I confess, I can see no reason, why the position may not be admitted, with perfect safety to the christian cause. If christianity proposes to our assent certain facts, which are contrary to the general course of human experience ; it likewise supplies an evidence greatly superior to what is sufficient for ascertaining natural and ordinary events. And it deserves to be considered, that an event happening out of the ordinary course of nature, or a work performed surpassing all human power, is not the less probable, but the contrary, for its being miraculous, that is, effected by the immediate agency of the deity or some superior being. No doubt, every reasonable person must reject what appears to him most unlikely upon the whole. We only contend, that we should not reject miracles upon a principle which will lead us to admit something still more strange and unaccountable. For we think it, by no means, so wonderful and incredible, that the deity should interpose and work the miracles recorded in the gospel, as that the whole complex evidence in their favour should be fictitious and delusive. This author, indeed, allows that a miracle is capable of proof ; but with this remarkable exception, that religion be no way concerned ; tho' to a common understanding, I should think

† *Hume's philosophical essays. Ess. 10.*

it would appear, that in no case is a miraculous interposition so probable, as in that of a religious institution suited to the exigencies of the human state, congruous to the divine goodness, and worthy of the divine patronage. In short, this celebrated maxim, in reality, decides nothing; and to infer from it, that all miracles ought to be rejected, is truly a begging of the question, or supposing the matter in debate. †

But the patrons of infidelity, not content with representing the friends of religion as credulous even to a miracle, would likewise persuade, that they embrace

† It was not intended, here, to display the evidence for the miracles, which were wrought in confirmation of our holy religion. That would have been a needless attempt, after what hath been done, this way, so often, and to such advantage, by the writers against infidelity. Neither was it intended to consider the particular objections proposed by Mr. *Hume*, in the second part of his essay, against any miraculous event or operation, where religion is concerned. The reader is remitted for satisfaction, on this head, to the judicious reflexions of Mr. *Adams* and Dr. *Leland*. The point in view was to examine the general principle assumed by this author, as sufficient to decide the question, concerning the truth of the christian miracles, in the negative. He attempts to put the controversy upon a new footing; and instead of the usual method of weighing the several presumptions and arguments produc'd by the opposite parties in the cause, he employs a new engine of his own invention, which he hopes will be found sufficient to rid the world of the impertinence of miracles, in time to come. I shall not attempt to rob him of the honour of this invention; tho', by the way, it may not be amiss to observe, that an objection of the same kind had been started and refuted, in *Butler's analogy*, and *The tryal of the witnesses*, not to mention any other writer. But however that be, upon trying the force of

a principle useless and even pernicious, as well as uncertain. They look upon devotion with a jealous eye, and would fain hinder its promotion above the

this vaunted argument, as it is amplified and enforced by our author, in his usual elegant and lively manner, I could not help thinking, that it was utterly harmless, so far as christianity is concerned; that instead of terminating the dispute, according to his magnificent pretensions, he hath left the matter just as he found it; and that the infidel cause is not so considerably recruited, as some may imagine, by the accession of this very profound reasoner to the party.

If the reasoning employed above shall appear, to some readers, too concise and general, or somewhat obscure; perhaps, what follows may contribute to set this matter in a fuller light.

Experience teaches, that things go on in an uniform tenor, and that the operations of the universe are conducted by general rules, which are usually denominated, by philosophers, the laws of nature. Their sentiments, however, concerning the nature and foundation of these laws, have been very different. Some have thought them wholly unalterable, and carried their notions so high concerning the fatal chain that binds the universe together, and the fixed and necessary operation of causes, as to exclude every mutation of the established order, and explode all miracles, as wholly absurd and ridiculous. Others, justly dissatisfied with these rigid principles, have gone to the quite opposite extreme, esteeming these laws of nature no better than a rope of sand, causality a fiction of the mind, and the mind itself a mere fortuitous assemblage of ideas, without any connecting principle or common bond of union. Some may think, that these curious discoveries have been owing to the refinements of some modern metaphysicians. There are not wanting, however, very evident traces of these several opinions, in the remaining records of antient philosophy. And Plato †

† *In Theateto.*

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rank of a clerical virtue. They think the interests of virtue may be supported, and the affairs of society conducted without the assistance of religion ; that

hath pleasantly enough distinguished the partisans of the opposite systems, by epithets exactly fitting their respective conceits, calling the former, the *stationary*, || and the latter, the *flowing* philosophers. * But there is a third species of philosophers, who esteem the scheme of nature neither altogether inflexible, nor wholly fluctuating ; judging nature to be divine art, and the laws of nature the laws of the supreme mind, who usually operates in conformity to these laws prescribed by his own infinite wisdom ; tho' sometimes he acts by prerogative, and, upon great and urgent occasions, suspends or over-rules them, according to his pleasure.

Now, it may be proper to consider our author's general maxim, as applied to the principles of these different species of philosophers. It is evident, that in the language of the two former, a miracle can mean no more, than what is strange and surprising, or a deviation from the usual course of nature ; whereas the theist includes, in his idea of a miracle, the notion of a superior power as the cause of that deviation. The abettors of the *stationary* system are bound, indeed, by their principles, to maintain the impossibility of miracles. Nevertheless, if their mighty fate be really universal, and extend to mind as well as matter, they must be greatly embarrassed by a testimony, in favour of a miracle, so strong, that its falshood would be no less surprising than the truth of the strange fact : the former involving a repugnancy to the laws of human action, no less manifest than the contrariety of the latter to those of material operation. And in all questions of this kind, it must be owned, the only reasonable course, upon their principles, would seem to be that of rejecting the most singular and wonderful of the two contending events, that is, in our author's language, the greater miracle. The

|| *στασιώδης*. * *ρηνώδης*.

virtue,

virtue, indeed, on certain emergencies, may be indebted to its subsidiary forces ; yet still, according to them, it is an auxiliary, whose operations are with

flowing philosopher, again, hath not the least pretence to insist upon the impossibility of miracles. However, being under a necessity to decline reasoning altogether, or embrace experience as his guide ; a conformity or non-conformity to the analogy of nature, becomes, to him, the test of truth or falshood, in all matters of this kind. When the falshood of the testimony and the truth of the fact are equally repugnant to the analogy of nature, it is impossible, upon the principles of these philosophers, to come to any decision ; and the mind must remain in a state of unnatural and uneasy suspense. But the theist, I imagine, is in circumstances more favourable. He will incline, even in the case supposed, to admit the truth of the fact ; because he recognizes a cause possess'd of power adequate to the most wonderful operation, and of wisdom too profound for man to fathom. We cannot rest satisfied till we discover the cause of any singular event, which would, otherwise, hurt and distract the mind, by its odd and unaccountable appearance. Such a cause appears on one side, but nothing of that kind on the other : for surely, neither the believer nor the infidel will have recourse to so wild a supposition, as that of the deity interposing to give to a testimony really false, all the appearances of one that is true. Thus the case will stand, when the truth of the fact, and the falshood of the testimony, are supposed equal, in point of contrariety to nature's usual course ; and when no satisfactory reason readily occurs for the deity's interposition. But now, let it be supposed, that a sufficient reason, of this kind, obviously presents itself ; that the occasion is great, and the end benevolent and noble, suitable to the goodness, and worthy of the majesty of the supreme being. Doth not this, of itself, bestow a credibility upon the miraculous event, and previously dispose the mind for its reception ? Here the theist no longer hesitates, but acquiesces in the evi-

so much difficulty directed, and whose forces are so hardly restrained from usurping upon the moral powers, which they pretend only to assist; that it may be

dence proposed in favour of a fact, which is now become probable, in its own nature, "and worthy of all acceptation." And in doing so, I apprehend, he acts with reason on his side. We may justly credit a testimony bearing, that a wise prince had levy'd a mighty army to repel a sudden invasion of his dominions; tho' we should very naturally demur to admit the same testimony in evidence of his doing so, merely for the sake of an useless and absurd ostentation of power and magnificence, or in order, like *Caligula*, to employ his troops in filling their helmets with cockle-shells. We have, all along, supposed the evidence barely sufficient to ballance the singularity of the miracle. But now, if there be a surplussage of evidence, (which may be safely maintain'd with respect to the christian miracles) abstracting from all consideration of the cause and occasion; it is easy to perceive, what must be the united weight of all these together.

This appears, to me, to be the fair way of stating the controversy. Would our adversaries hope to prevail, they must give themselves some more trouble than they usually do. They must give some probable account of the rise and progress of christianity, supposing it the delirium of visionary, or the fiction of knavish brains. They must point out an evidence, in favour of a notorious and acknowledged imposture, equally clear and cogent with that which supports our holy religion. Nay, in order to do their business effectually, they must do more. They must show, that the occasion, on which the false miracles were pretended to be worked, was equally great and worthy of the divine interposition, with that on which the christian miracles were performed. When they have done all this, the decisive tone will become them, and they may triumph with a better grace.

made a question, whether, upon the whole, it might not be most prudent for virtue, to decline any alliance or confederacy with religion.

Now, the force of such reasoning consists entirely in substituting a spurious and futile superstition, in the room of true religion, the friend of virtue and human kind. Let the divinity be ever beheld, in the pure

Moreover, it may be worth while to take notice, that our experience of the veracity of human testimony, is not the sole foundation of the assent which we yield to the report of witnesses. We receive their testimony in many cases, without so much as reflecting upon their character, either in point of probity or capacity. Nay sometimes we would be bound to admit their evidence, tho' we were assured both of their knavery and folly. Suppose a number of persons to concur exactly in telling the very same story, and that the circumstances are such as plainly exclude the possibility of any previous concert among themselves. In this case, the principal reason of our assent, is manifestly the impossibility of accounting for the concurrence of so many persons in relating the same story, without supposing its truth and reality. For as the fictions of the human mind are infinite, that two persons, and much more that a greater number of persons, should concur, by accident, in imagining the same precise fact, cloathed with the very same circumstances, is improbable as *infinite* to one. Hence, I imagine, it is clear, that we can without difficulty conceive a testimony sufficient to overcome the general presumption against miracles, which ariseth from experience, how strong soever that presumption may be supposed. It will likewise follow, with respect to christianity, that, so far as we can show there was no concert or collusion among the witnesses, we have an evidence independent even of their honesty and understanding.

I shall only observe farther, that it appears pretty singular to explode miracles only where religion is
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light of the gospel, as the perfection of goodness, streaming forth continually in benevolent energies throughout all creation. Let religion be conceived, according to the true spirit of christianity, as the medicine of our moral disorders, and the grand instrument of assimilation to this superlative goodness, pouring each worthy and humane sentiment and affection into the heart, preserving them there pure and fervent, and causing them to overflow in correspondent acts of beneficence in the life and behaviour. Taking things in this view, is it possible, not to esteem that devotion, which hath for its object a being so venerable and lovely, as the noblest ornament of human nature, as the surest guard and most potent incentive to virtue, and the most effectual restraint on vice of every kind? Religion, pure and amiable, such as the gospel represents her, is, indeed, a noble means to purify and transform the soul; to beget an inward life, temper and habit of goodness and moral worth. That bond, by which man is connected with his maker, links also man to man, in closer and firmer union. But it doth more.—Religion communicates

concerned; seeing no other supposable case seems to demand them, upon so good a title. And when they are wrought, in behalf of an institution utterly repugnant to the prevailing religions of the times, it is evident, that mens attachment to their antient superstition is an obstruction to their reception, and tends to show, in a very strong light, the force of that evidence, which was able to surmount so mighty an obstacle. See *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul*, in a letter to *Gilbert West, Esq;* where this point is argued, in a very masterly way.

new dignity and lustre to virtue, settles it on a firmer foundation, and renders its happy fruits less uncertain and precarious. When we view this lovely form, in the light of religion, as the counsellor, the companion, the delight of the omnipotent ruler of the world, as the law throughout his universal and everlasting empire, ennobling and blessing all her votaries, thro' every period of their immortal duration: doth she not assume a more august and commanding aspect, and wear more attractive and irresistible charms, to captivate the whole soul and engage every passion of the human heart; than when she is viewed merely as the cement and grace of human society, confined in her operations to this precarious state of being, and bounded in her influence by the grave, 'the house appointed for all living,' which swallows up for ever all the projects of men, and terminates every human prospect, when God and religion are dropt out of view? It is principally from the association with religion, that virtue can claim the attributes of sublime, grand and venerable, and acquires power to expand the soul to a noble amplitude, and raise it to a lofty elevation. Whenever religion leaves the world, she will carry the most powerful incitements and the firmest supports of magnanimity, fortitude and every kind of heroism, away with her, and leave poor mortals, more than ever, the sport and prey of their selfish and malignant passions. Her absence will be deeply felt, and expose the nakedness and imbecility of human nature, in such a manner, as it is not easy for us now to conceive. To rob men of devotion, of all confidence in a superior and better nature than

than their own, is to rob them of the only sovereign balm for human infirmity and misery. The poor man, who hath been struggling all the day with various and complicated distress, yet, possessing a good conscience and confiding in a good God, he can retire to rest, with an inward composure and complacency, to be envy'd even by the king upon his throne. The effects of this divine principle, tho' silent, for the most part, and secret, are yet so salutary and exhilarating to the soul, that men must lose more than half their felicity, when they lose their religion. In short, virtue never excites such animated and durable emotions, as when she is associated with religion : she never appears so grand and becoming, as when she is grafted upon piety.

Pity it is, they should not be always undivided companions ! But, alas ! we must own with regret, that sometimes a most unnatural and incongruous divorce takes place, of morality from religion. There are few, indeed, who exclude virtue altogether from their theological system, unless, perhaps, some delirious and savage enthusiasts, possessed, doubtless, of a most malignant and mischievous demon, but not of that kind, which goeth out by reasoning or persuasion. Nevertheless, even of those religions which retain morality as an essential ingredient, the general spirit is often such, as to adulterate rather than refine, depress rather than exalt, and confine rather than enlarge it. Nay sometimes they serve directly to arm virtue against herself, and teach men to renounce humanity, to harass and destroy one another, in all the methods of a holy perfidy and consecrated cruelty.

Yea,

Yea, some of these monstrous and pernicious institutions have the impudence to assume the christian name, tho' totally devoid of its genuine spirit. Let not us, however, judge of pure christianity, by its appearance, under such an ugly horrible disguise; nor make the gospel itself to suffer, by the unnatural perversions to which it is liable, like every thing else, how good and excellent soever in its own nature, when it falls under the management of human folly and depravity.——But religion, it is said, hath been abused to the subversion of morality. So hath the sense of honour, from the guardian, been turned into the betrayer of virtue. Is the desire of esteem, therefore, to be exploded, as of no use in the moral system? And, I imagine, it may deserve the consideration of certain licentious spirits of our times, whether the saint or the man of honour be the greatest pest of human society? Now that among numbers of those, whom, in compliance with vulgar idiom, we shall call the better sort, a fantastick honour, which hath not the least communion with sense or reason or the common good of men, is become the whole system both of religion and morals.

But still, it merits our special notice, as teachers of religion, that men are often, in a great measure, strangers to its moral and most worthy influences, even when the principles of their faith, have, in general, a favourable aspect toward virtue. Their religion is an aggregate of various opinions, which operate on various powers of the human mind, upon the understanding and imagination, as well as the heart and conscience. The objects it proposes serve to awaken

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their admiration, their hopes and their fears, those universal and vigorous passions, as well as the more delicate and refin'd affections, which hold more directly of true piety and virtue. Now there may be numbers, who are extremely susceptible of the former emotions, while the objects of the latter make but very feeble impressions upon their hearts. But still, as those are associated with religion, and constitute a considerable part of its complex notion, as well as these, and are, besides, wonderfully soothing and agreeable, nay even ravishing and transporting to spirits of a certain complexion ; we need not be surpris'd that many should be dispos'd to indulge them, and to flatter themselves, in this indulgence, that they feel the genuine power of godliness, and have entered into the true spirit of religion ; while, perhaps, its more ingenuous, worthy and benign energies have never reached their hearts. Hence these various characters, the bigot, the superstitious, the enthusiast. The two former are the more common and remarkable ; but the latter is generally the more impregnable and dangerous. This enthusiastic disposition seems to arise, principally, from the want of a just apprehension of the ultimate aim of religion, of a due ascertainment of its essential spirit, and, by consequence, from a readiness to mistake every violent emotion of the religious kind, for that temper, or a branch of it, which it is the great end of religion to implant and cultivate in the soul. Whereas, it is certain, that to imagine any extatic raptures, how violent or delicious soever, yet having little or no resemblance or connexion with the sentiments of virtuous piety and moral goodness ;

ness ; to imagine these, I say, to be the genuine effects of pure and undefil'd religion, would be a mistake equally pernicious and ridiculous, with that of a person, who should fancy himself mightily improved in devotion, merely because he beheld the comely and magnificent structure, in which the worship was performed, with a kind of rapturous delight.

Thus far, then, concerning some of the chief articles of intellectual furniture, which it is fit and becoming us to be possess'd of, especially in our present circumstances. Let us now consider some of the chief qualities of the heart, which are requisite, in the same way.

All the virtues may be deduced, very properly, from the general decorum of human nature, as implying a certain tenor of affection and action, congruous to the general constitution of the mind of man. The more special decorum of christian teachers, binds all the same virtues upon us with new ties, and renders every moral blemish the more conspicuous, every turpitude the more shameful, every transgression the more enormous, every vice more signally criminal, and every sin more eminently sinful. Immorality of every kind, is attended with the peculiar infamy and aggravation in a minister, of being a blunder in his own art, and betrays an incapacity and ignorance, of all others the most opprobrious, because it is in a science, whereof he makes profession, and in which he ought to be a master.

There are some virtues, however, which become us, in a special manner, and which men naturally consider as eminently requisite in persons of our pro-

feſſion. They reckon, with a degree of confidence and ſecurity upon finding them in our character, and are generally ſhocked, and juſtly ſhocked, when they are diſappointed.

Among theſe, piety toward God juſtly challenges the firſt place. An impious miniſter ! Is it poſſible to conceive a more incongruous and deteſtable character, an object of more juſt and univerſal execration ? Every vice is unbecoming in a miniſter, but impiety includes every other indecency and aggravates it to the utmoſt. It is a direct and open renunciation of our maſter's authority. It is high treaſon againſt that ſupreme Lord, whoſe ſervants we profeſs to be, in a particular manner. Other vices are unfuitable to our character, and tend, in general, to defile and debaſe it ; but this tarniſhes and deforms it wholly, and daubs it all over with one large ſtain of infamy.

Would we deſire, therefore, to be a credit and ornament to our ſacred function ? Would we deſire to be maſters of an interior fund of pure, elevated and independent ſerenity and joy ? Would we deſire, in ſine, to own a character congruous to the general dignity and decorum of human nature ? Let us cultivate, with peculiar ardor and ſedulity, an acquaintance with that piety, which is rational and virtuous, manly and honourable ; and labour to feel the ſublime and amiable ſpirit of true devotion.

A ſpirit of devotion ought to penetrate every faculty of the mind, and communicate its peculiar flavour to all the virtues ; which muſt be deeply tintured, as it were, with this ſpirit, and retain and diſcuſe the perfume and reliſh thereof. This devotes
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and consecrates them. This turns them from moral to divine. 'It is surely a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord ;'† and 'praise is comely for the upright.'‖ Be it our care, therefore, brethren, to approve ourselves the faithful guardians of this ethereal flame. We pray God it may not be suffered to degenerate or languish under our tuition, but may be transmitted pure and fervent to succeeding generations !

Benevolence toward men is another eminent virtue, highly becoming the ministers of that religion, where charity is described as 'the end of the commandment,† the fulfilling of the law,‡ the bond of perfectness,‖ and as alone abiding always.'* I need not say 'how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity.'** I need not attempt to describe those exquisitely tender and agreeable sensations, which have ever distinguished the benevolent sympathetic passions, ascertain'd their rank among the chief and most worthy ingredients of human felicity, and conferred upon them the well-merited appellation of the soul of sublunary bliss. Permit me only to observe, that christianity discovers various new sources of relation and bonds of union between the sons of men, and gives us such views both of the dignity and degradation of the human nature, of our common pitiable circumstances in the present transient state, and of our glorious prospects in the succeeding eternal one ; as tend mightily to

† Ps. xcii. 1. ‖ Ps. xxxiii. 1. † 1 Tim. i. 5 ‡
Rom. xiii. 10. ‖ Col. iii. 14. * 1 Cor. xiii. 8, 13.
** Ps. cxxxiii. 1.

draw closer the social tie, to reinforce the powers of mutual sympathy, to infuse a more exquisite tenderness into its feelings, and to communicate a superior force and stability to its operations. If we are animated with the true spirit of our religion, we will be so far from employing the powers of the world to come, to disturb the quiet or subvert the order of the present, that we will be careful, on the contrary, to point their whole artillery against those vices which deform and distress human society ; and will make all the doctrines of faith, agreeably to the declared sentiments of its divine author, to center in a very opposite aim, an aim truly humane and truly christian, even the promoting and maintaining peace on earth and good will toward men. If we feel the force of this active grace of charity, if we have any ambition to follow Jesus, ‘ who went about doing good ;’ we will prefer the joys of the heart to any other, and hold them not only superior to those pleasurable sensations, which we enjoy in common with inferior animals, but will not suffer even the far nobler pleasures of the understanding and imagination to come in competition with these still worthier and more exquisite delights.

After speaking of charity, the sum and perfection, the cement and grace of all the other virtues, it would be a breach of propriety to enter into a detail of the rest, before so discerning an audience.— Give me leave, however, to specify humility ; as a requisite varnish, so to speak, to shew the other virtues to advantage, and to preserve them from corruption and decay.

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Humility holds that rank in christianity, as to bear that singular mark of distinction, the noble eulogy of being Christ's own virtue, 'who was eminently meek and lowly in heart.' It is a modest unassuming virtue, which obtains respect and influence by not asking them; and is of all other ornaments the most becoming 'the servant of the Lord, who must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.'† It is the noblest kind of temperance, as it serves to curb the exorbitance of that passion for renown, which is so deeply rooted in the human constitution, is so impatient of restraint, and so pernicious when suffer'd to domineer without controul. Not that we should undervalue a good reputation, or trample upon honest fame. Least of all men, can this be the duty of ministers, whose business it is to lead men to holiness, in the way of persuasion; and whose success, for that reason, must eminently depend upon the opinion which men entertain of their personal and interior worth. It is not likely, we shall reach the hearts of others, and cause them to enter into the same sympathetic emotions with ourselves, by means of exhortations, how warm or vehement soever, while yet they are suspected as not coming from our own hearts. It is thus that a regard to reputation hath its use, in promoting the best interests of others. It is no less useful in guarding the virtuous principle in ourselves, during its feeble and infirm state. We must study, however,

† 2 Tim. ii. 24.

to be good, purely for the sake of being so, and not merely in order to purchase a good name. Virtue must be courted for herself, with a sincere, unadulterated passion, and without any devious views to any superadded portion or accessory advantages. Now, if we would desire to be of the number of those generous suiters of virtue, we must hold the desire of esteem as a means and not an end, as a temporary scaffolding for erecting the moral structure; whose continuance, after it is finished, will add nothing to the strength or beauty of the building. Let us retain it in our service, as long as its assistance is necessary to subdue the more ignoble passions, suffering it to remain the latest among the props of a feeble virtue; dismissing it, however, at length, that virtue may rest on her own basis, self-balanced and self-secure, indifferent to the contempt or applause of men, and, regardless of every other smile or frown, but that of her great parent, together with him may reign, with sweet, undivided empire in our breasts. This is the perfection of virtue, the last finishing and ultimate polish of moral decorum, to be always going on from one graceful act of goodness to another, shedding abroad the fruits of virtue spontaneously, without effort and without constraint, satisfied with the pure exertion of moral energies, without boasting of the performance, nay, in a manner, without knowing it; as the vine bringeth forth its clusters, and having fulfilled the destination of nature, in yielding its own proper fruit, passes on to a new production of grapes, in their season.

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But now, all these intellectual and moral acquisitions must be reduced to practice, and exemplified in our publick instructions, and in our general demeanour in private life.

We ought to be careful, in our publick discourses to the people, to aid their conceptions, and inflame their love of God and true goodness, and to direct them to the proper means of acquiring and cultivating all the proper and becoming virtues of human nature. Decency requires this to be done ; but it requires also, that it be done in the true evangelical taste and spirit, and that all the moral duties be explained upon christian principles, and enforced by christian motives.

As in morals, so in eloquence, the right conduct of the imagination is an affair of capital importance, but difficult and delicate execution. If we are careful, however, never to lose sight of the great end of all our instructions, which is to make men wiser and better, we shall be most effectually secured from the more prejudicial and unseemly errors relating to the management of that faculty. When we would persuade men to the love and practice of holiness and virtue, it is surely a very proper use of imagination to employ it in presenting moral and divine objects to their minds, in their own, entire, native splendor and beauty ; by making an exact evolution, so to speak, of their interior and most engaging qualities, exhibiting their principal properties and powers in one compleat and regular enumeration, and unfolding them in full expansion before our hearers, so as to arrest, and occupy and ravish the whole soul. Is not all this ab-

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solutely necessary, in order to convey the object whole to the mind, make it strike with its full force and insure its compleat effect? Or would it be an infraction of any law of just criticism, to advance a step farther, and, by availing ourselves of the analogy which subsists between the material and moral, the sensible and spiritual world, to aid our conceptions of the latter, by images and illustrations drawn from the former? I apprehend, not. Wherein consists, then, the abuse of imagination in eloquence? Chiefly, I suppose, in employing it for its own sake, instead of using it as an engine to reach the heart, to seize the conscience and rouse the passions; in employing it to play and tickle, to amuse and divert, to shine and sparkle, to dazzle and confound, without any ulterior determinate aim. This is surely a most notorious abuse of that faculty, to make it serve to withdraw the hearer's attention from the great object you would recommend to his affection and pursuit, and to lead him only to gaze upon its brilliant lustre and to admire its sprightly fallies. This is truly to obstruct, instead of forwarding, any solid conviction or true pathetic emotion in the minds of the hearers; and the imagination thus perverted is really no better than those wandering meteors, which perplex instead of directing the devious traveller, by their bewildering lustre. Whereas, if we really meant to instruct and persuade and move effectually, and knew how to accomplish our purpose, we would study, as much as possible, to disappear ourselves, and frame and utter our sermons in such a manner, that the subject, and not the speaker, should arrest the attention

tention of the hearers, and engross their whole regard and affection. In a word, we are to view the imagination, chiefly, as an avenue to the heart and to the conscience, and employ it to infuse warmth into the former, and impress conviction upon the latter. All gaudy and superfluous decorations, which contribute nothing to the just and entire effect of the piece, are justly exploded, even in those inferior arts, whose end is more immediately to please; how much more ought these ambitious ornaments to be retrenched, in inculcating the solemn and weighty truths of religion?

It is indubitably our duty to study and practise every accomplishment, which may serve to conciliate the hearts of men to religion; and in this view, a careful endeavour to attain a graceful management of the voice, countenance and gesture, is rather to be encouraged than despis'd or condemn'd.

But here, let it be ever remembered, that nothing but what is natural can please, and that affectation and grace are in a state of irreconcilable opposition. What is false and affected, is always offensive and nauseous. Let us never lose sight of nature. Follow the bent of your own genius, if you are desirous of pleasing. Let each endeavour to find out his own vein, and draw from that source, rather than copy after any model, furnished by another, however excellent. Not that every kind and degree of secondary imitation is altogether to be exploded. But let these inferior patterns be estimated *wholly* by their likeness to nature herself, and employed *only* as helps to assist us in drawing after this true and ultimate origi-

nal. Let the sentiments be derived from our own interior and genuine sense of things, from our own native and most intimate feelings ; and the whole manner be the pure emanation of nature, improved, if you will, and matured, but not shackled and distorted, by art and culture. A person who moves in trammels, will, most certainly, not be able to walk gracefully.

For here, it is naturally suggested to our notice, that, as there is a general decorum of the minister, so there is a particular decorum of the man. It is undoubtedly true, that a certain manner, tho' not absolutely best in itself, is nevertheless best, in a relative consideration, as being most congruous to the individual. Nature hath poured forth, amidst the general uniformity, which is so pleasing and so necessary to facilitate our acquaintance with her productions, by enabling us to range them into classes ; nature, I say, amidst all this uniformity, hath diffused a surprising and elegant variety, and diversified her most similar productions by certain peculiar modifications, which are no less apparent in our internal than external structure, and render the complexions of minds no less various than those of faces. Now to attempt to expunge these discriminating strokes, and to reduce all to a languid invariable sameness, is utterly repugnant to the principles of true gracefulness, and would greatly impair, and, in a manner, deaden the beauty of nature.

And, to this individual decorum, so to speak, I conceive, we must have a special regard, in our general

neral deportment in life and conversation with men, which comes now in the last place, to be considered.

The minister must always appear as well as the man. Our character is not to be thrown off with our habit, but carried along with us into the world. We must wear religion in company as well as at church; and let the christian and the minister be seen in the general strain of our conversation and tenor of our actions. We should endeavour to make our conversation circulate improvement as well as our sermons; and exemplify in our private behaviour that operative virtue, we so much press in our publick exhortations. But while we know what belongs to our general character as ministers, we ought likewise to consider what suits our personal one as individuals. Nothing but what is natural and genuine can meet with a general good reception from the world. No man must go beyond his own measure, nor presume to exceed the modesty of nature, or else he will infallibly reap the chastisement of ridicule, instead of the reward of applause. We must act, as well as speak, each in his own style; otherwise, whatever we say or do, will be so awkward and so ungainly, as to shock the more intelligent, and alienate instead of gaining their affections to religion. ‘Let your conversation always be with grace,’ says the apostle, † becoming and agreeable; ‘seasoned with salt,’ quickening and instructive.

‘Walk decently,’ says the same apostle, as in the day.’ ‡ And our Lord tells his disciples, that, ‘like

† Col. iv. 6. ‡ Rom. xiii. 13.

a city which is set on an hill, they cannot be hid.' || Such motives will have, and ought to have, their weight. We must be careful to give no offence, that the ministry be not blamed. * But still, it is a small matter to the worthy minister, to be judged of man's judgment, which hardly elevates him, when it is favourable, and when it is otherwise, gives him but little inquietude. He hath a tenderness for his own character, and an anxious sollicitude to preserve it uniform and uncontaminated, out of pure reverence to himself, tho' no other eye should behold him. He is chiefly concerned about having a good report of his own conscience, and appearing in a good light, in the eye of his master. He walks before God, and goes on unto perfection. He avoids even the appearance of evil, and is careful to maintain a due and apparent distance from the dubious confines of vice. He measures his conduct, not by that gross and vulgar species of justice, whose infractions come within the cognizance of human tribunals. He hath a more divine standard of justice within his own breast, which condemns often when the world acquits, and sometimes applauds when the world condemns.

The tide of prejudice doth not, at present, seem to run in our favour. This lays us under some disadvantages, in acting our part with propriety, but, at the same time, enhances the merit of success. Nothing but the purity of our morals can support us, with any tolerable credit. While we retain a sound moral constitution, are possessed of vigorous moral

|| Math. v. 14. * 2 Cor. vi. 3.

habits, and display them in the outward manners, with tolerable grace and propriety, we shall still be able to extort the approbation of men, and insure our usefulness and credit. But if we part with this radical principle of worth and true decorum, we shall fall, and justly fall, into universal contempt; and become, as the most worthless, so the most despicable among men, the very refuse of human society, and the reproach of the house of God. ‘The salt which hath lost its savor, or poignancy, is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.’ †

Altho’ our portion of those exterior goods, which challenge imperiously vulgar respect and influence, in general, is but small; nevertheless, it is reasonable to think, that the sense of mankind can hardly ever be so much debauched, but it will be in real life, in a great measure, as in those dramatick representations of it, where the general applause doth fall, not upon him who sustains the most magnificent character, but the person who supports the character allotted to him, be it high and honourable, or mean and despicable, with superior grace and propriety. The apostle *Paul* enjoins *Titus*, ‘to let no man despise him.’ * He doth not scruple, you see, to make a superiority to contempt, the subject of a precept; and in doing so, he is, by no means, to be accounted as speaking like one who is ignorant of human nature. It is not, perhaps, in our power, to acquire the fame of superior penetration or learning; but surely we may be able

† Math. v. 13. * Tir. ii. 15.

to administer sound, wholesome instruction, to those whom providence hath assign'd to our special guidance, and to walk before them, in the plain path of integrity and honour. We cannot, perhaps, command the admiration of men by our rank and genius ; but virtue will not refuse to dwell with us, be our parts ever so inconsiderable, or our circumstances ever so mean : and wherever virtue resides, peace and love will always attend her.

There is a kind of censorial function annexed to our office, in the exercise of which, we have occasion for a more than ordinary measure of discretion. It hath the appearance of arrogance and an usurped ascendancy over others, which cannot fail to exasperate instead of correcting, unless tempered with much insinuating mildness, and conducted with all the meekness of wisdom, and the utmost regard to propriety and decency. The best way to acquit ourselves of this part of our function, would be to maintain such a decency of carriage and unaffected gravity of demeanour, as would beget respect, and make the offender blush before us. Where a direct reprehension would prove hurtful, an oblique one may sometimes be practised with success ; or if a fair occasion of employing the latter doth not present itself, we have still the resource of a grave and expressive silence. ‘ There is a reproof, says the son of *Sirach*, that is not comely.’ † Prudence, indeed, is a quality of eminent account to a minister, now especially, that we seem, in general, to have less hold on the minds of men, from our cha-

† Ecclus. xx. 1.

acter, than in former periods. Our Lord counsels, 'to join the wisdom of the serpent, to the innocence of the dove.' * A small dash of folly, often renders the best dispositions, in a great measure, useless; and sometimes, even ridiculous.

Would we, then, desire to be possessed of that holiness, which ever becomes the house of God? Let us have our eyes continually fixed upon the august and amiable form, especially as reflected from the character and manners of our blessed Saviour. In him was virtue herself exhibited, so to speak, in a bodily form, and rendered sensible to bodily sight, walking up and down among men, in grand and beautiful proportion, venerable and comely majesty. 'Grace was poured into his lips.' † 'He did all things gracefully.' ‡ Let us conceive one great entire purpose of universal integrity, and ever aim and press vigorously forward to perfection. Finally, brethren, 'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.' || Such a grand conception and comprehensive purpose is the shortest and surest method of attaining unto the full stature of virtue, and, when seconded and farther animated by the genial irradiations of the divine spirit, will form the moral character, not partially, by sudden starts, and at several intervals, according to the

* Math. x. 16. † Psalm. xlv. 2. ‡ Mark vii. 37.
καλῶς. || Phil. iv. 8.

slow, interrupted and detached operations of art; but, like those wonderful processes of vegetation, which are conducted by the magic hand of nature, will throw out at once, by one great effort, the entire moral species, and cause all its parts to expand and shoot up together, in vigour, harmony and beauty. ‘ I will be as the dew unto *Israel*; he shall cast forth his roots, his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree. † The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in *Lebanon*. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing. || They shall go from strength to strength, until they appear before God in *Zion*. For the Lord is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.’ *

Hitherto I have presumed, under the correction of my reverend fathers and brethren, to direct the discourse, in a special manner, to them. Let me now take the liberty, to address myself to the rest of the audience.

I am persuaded, my christian brethren, there is not one among you all, who doth not perceive the propriety and feel the force of the argument, drawn from what is just and meet and decent in the ministerial character and profession. You are greatly shocked at any notorious breach of decency, in one

† Hof. xiv. 5, 6. || Psalm. xcii. 12, 13, 14. * Plal. lxxxiv. 7, 11.

of our order, and are ready to cry out, in honest indignation, A wicked minister, monstrous ! It is nature, we own, that prompts you to exclaim in that manner, and we acknowledge the justness of the reproach. Now, you will not be so unreasonable, I hope, as to take it amiss, that I should retort the argument upon you, take the advantage of a sentiment so natural and so familiar to you, and employ it to prove the obligations you are under with greater conviction, and press them home upon the conscience with superior force. A wicked minister, you say, and you say very truly, is a monstrous character. But what think you of a wicked christian ? Do you perceive no incongruity and unseemliness there, that shocks and wounds your most natural and intimate feelings ? Are you not ashamed, yea even confounded to wear a character, to which you are a disgrace and a reproach ? Would you not think yourselves rather affronted than honoured, by having a picture held out as your own, to which you bear no resemblance, nor, indeed, any relation at all, but that of a foil, to set off its transcendent beauty ? Doubtless, you have great reason to glory in your christian profession : ‘ only, let your conversation be as it becomes the gospel of Christ.’ † Suffer me, ‘ to exhort and charge every one of you, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory ; || that ye would walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work ; * that ye would walk worthy of the vocation where-

† Phil. i. 27. || 1 Theff. ii. 11, 12. * Col. i. 10.

with ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love,†

A good deal hath been said, above, concerning that spirit of infidelity and libertinism, which seems to characterize the present age, beyond any that hath preceded it; and I wish it may hereby, also, be discriminated from all succeeding ones. There are not wanting some in this assembly, whose rank and education, whose general converse and more enlarged correspondence qualify them for being competent judges of the truth and propriety of what hath been advanced. To them, therefore, I would humbly beg leave to address these few notices following in a special manner.

Your country, brethren, calls upon you, to stretch out your hand, for her relief. The church of God beseeches you, not to withhold your succour, in the day of her distress. To you it is submitted, how far the advocates of infidelity have reason for their confident boasting, and of what kind those obligations are, under which they have laid human society, by their zealous and incessant endeavours to sap the foundations of religion, which hath hitherto passed for a principal band of the social union. Much is in your power, brethren, both in the way of counsel and example. The warfare is of that kind, where volunteers may be often of more service, than the regular, or, if you will, the mercenary troops. We beseech you, then, ‘to hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering; ‡ to beware lest any

† Eph. iv. 1, 2. ‡ Heb. x. 23.

of a CHRISTIAN TEACHER.

man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit ; || to be no more tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.' * But while you are careful to maintain faith, be no less so to maintain a good conscience, and to adorn your principles, by a becoming practice. When shall we see revived the happy days, when christianity could make a boast of her sons, and hold them out in triumph to the unbelieving world, bidding them judge of the tree by its fruit, and superseding, as well she might, for the most part, all other defence ! Let not us, we beseech you, be loaded with the double burden, of defending religion against your practice, as well as their principles. If you retort the charge upon us, and desire us, first of all, to correct and purify our own order ; we will neither palliate, nor extenuate, nor deny any thing you can justly offer, on this head. If any of our order prostitute religion to the service of their unhallowed passions or selfish designs ; if they attempt to avail themselves of the rooted prejudices and apply to the grosser passions of the vulgar, not to refine and moderate, but to exasperate and inflame them to a pitch of factious and ungovernable fury ; if any of them betray a want of that moral delicacy, which is so becoming and so essential to their character, and undermine the efficacy of their doctrine by the unseemliness of their practice : we are sorry, extremely sorry for it ; we will do every thing in our power to wipe off the aspersion ;

|| Col. ii. 8. * Eph. iv. 14.

The Qualifications and Decorum, &c.

we disclaim them as brethren; we deliver them over to your just indignation and contempt; we give you liberty to treat them as the offscourings of all things, as the pests of society and scandals of religion. — In your censures, however, let religion itself be unhurt; and let the ministerial character be, as it ought to be, and as we would persuade ourselves it will be, held in due esteem and honour.

THE END.

ERRATUM.

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